



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 01278656 6

### NOTICE.

The Trustees of the New-York Society Library deem it their duty to request all persons interested in the institution to exercise a little care in preventing the Books from getting injured when taken out of the Library. They are frequently blotted, scribbled in, and torn by children, and often soiled by servants bringing them to the Library without an envelope.

It should also be remembered, that no person has a right to insert any comments, however correct, in the margin, or other parts of a Book, either with a pen or pencil. This practice induces others to disfigure the page with idle and unnecessary remarks.

According to the By-Laws of the Society, any person losing or injuring a Book is liable to make reparation to the full value of the whole set to which the volume may belong.

XE  
3964  
Svenska







\*EI





*millidrum*

# SELECT ORATIONS,

AND OTHER

## IMPORTANT PAPERS,

RELATIVE TO THE SWEDISH ACADEMY.

FOUNDED

BY HIS PRESENT MAJESTY

GUSTAVUS III. *King of Sweden*

MARCH 20TH, 1786.

---

TRANSLATED FROM THE SWEDISH LANGUAGE

BY

N. G. AGANDER.

---

L O N D O N :

PRINTED BY T. DAVISON, FLEET-STREET.

FOR J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

M,DCC,XCII.

*Z. H.*



19772B

---

## TABLE OF CONTENTS.

FRONTISPIECE emblematical of the Institution of the SWEDISH Academy on the 20th of March, 1786.

1. EXPLANATION of the Frontispiece.
2. INAUGURAL Oration, delivered by the KING in the SWEDISH Academy, March 20, 1786.
3. A DISCOURSE delivered in the SWEDISH Academy on Dec. 20, 1786, by Mr. de ROSENSTEIN, perpetual Secretary, &c.
4. DISCOURSE delivered by Mr. SIÖBERG on his Admission to the SWEDISH Academy, May 13, 1787.
5. CURSORY Remarks on Taste and the Belles Lettres, read to the SWEDISH Academy, Dec. 20, 1787, by Mr. de ROSENSTEIN, perpetual Secretary, &c.
6. DISCOURSE delivered by the Count OXENSTIerna, &c. March 20, 1786.



39X677



---

## EXPLANATION OF THE FRONTISPIECE.

---

THE lustre of the Fine Arts, which successively illuminates the different parts of the world, is represented by that Vivid Radiance, with which in northern climates, the evening sky, just at the setting of the Sun, is beautifully decorated.

A LOFTY range of Rude Mountains covered with Ice and Snow, allude to the State of SWEDEN, before the introduction of the Arts and Sciences. On the Summit of one of these Mountains APOLLO reclines. His Lyre, suspended from his shoulders, rests upon the Rock. The place confesses the presence of the God, and the Ice and Snow are seen to melt away. This Deity, in the act of taking off his Mask, discovers the respected Countenance of GUSTAVUS III.

REVIVING as at the return of spring after a severe winter, the Shrubs appear in a state of vegetation; and display the effect of that genial warmth, which is derived from the influence of the God of day.

THE



## EXPLANATION OF THE FRONTISPIECE.

THE sceptred APOLLO points to a large Temple situated at a distance. In the frieze of this edifice are exhibited those insignia which characterize the different Academies at STOCKHOLM: that of the Sciences; that of the Belles Lettres, History, and Antiquities; that of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture; that of Music; all of which have been embellished by the munificence of GUSTAVUS III.

THE front displays a Serpent, the emblem of Eternity; and exhibits the motto of the SWEDISH Academy: "To Genius and Taste."

IN the foreground appear several Groups of Spectators, representing the inhabitants of the North. Some of them behold with admiration the Sanctuary of Science, while others with gratitude direct their attention towards the august Monarch, who is at once the honour and the patron of the Arts. Under their feet they trample beds of Thistles, an emblem of the ignorance of former ages.





---

NEQUE QUEMQUAM MAGIS DECET, VEL MELIORA SCIRE, VEL PLURA  
QUAM PRINCIPEM, CUJUS DOCTRINA OMNIBUS POTEST PRODESSE  
SUBJECTIS.

VEGET.

---

A N  
O R A T I O N,

DELIVERED BY HIS SACRED MAJESTY

*G U S T A V U S III.*

ON THE FOUNDATION OF THE  
S W E D I S H A C A D E M Y,

MARCH 20, 1786.

B



---

A N  
O R A T I O N

B Y  
*G U S T A V U S III.*

---

**T**O promote the welfare of my kingdom, has ever been my first object ; to increase the glory of the Swedish name, my warmest wish. The fame of our country has long been diffused throughout Europe by our victorious arms : but, whilst its splendor has dazzled our eyes, it has too frequently excited sorrow in our hearts. Another species of fame is still reserved for our attainment, that which attends upon Literature and the cultivation of the Liberal Arts — a fame which bids defiance to the ravages of time, and despises the transient celebrity of conquest. This

B 2

is

is an excellence, however, which can only be acquired in seasons of public tranquillity. The spark of genius is indeed not unfrequently elicited by the rude conflicts of the warring elements ; but in seasons of tumult and desolation, it is speedily smothered and expires. Extinguished by the tempests of war, the sacred embers of genius must be fostered into flame by the gentle zephyr of peace. While, however, the blessing of peace contributes to the prosperity and happiness of a state, still it must be confessed that it too frequently creates in the minds of men a barbarous indolence, and damps the ardour of that genius, which, under more favourable circumstances, would have enlightened and adorned the country in which it was produced. Such indeed is the nature of man, that he can be animated only by action, and must have strong motives to excite his mental powers. A state of tranquillity, so essential to human happiness, has a wonderful tendency to enervate the understanding, unless mankind are impelled to utility by the most powerful motives, and are prevented by the prospect of fame from sinking into a lethargic slumber, equally dangerous to individuals and to the community at large.

THAT emulation and energy, which are excited by the sciences and literature, are, during a season of tranquillity, the only means of preserving in the mind that ardour which prompts men to serve their country, and in every threatening danger to rescue it from ruin.

UNLESS, however, our language be cultivated in foreign countries, the merit of the best compositions will be little known ; nor, until it be reduced

duced to the œconomy of settled laws, is such a cultivation possible. Without good writers, a language will never rise into estimation ; and, without established rules, it cannot be written with propriety.

For the accomplishment of these important purposes, I have this day founded an institution ; and I appoint you, gentlemen, to establish laws for the construction of the Swedish language, and to raise to perfection that structure, of which I have at this time only laid the basis.

To effect this, it is requisite that science, genius, learning, and taste, should all concur : but these are seldom united in one person. It became necessary, therefore, to establish a society, composed of members who felt an ardent attachment to polite literature, and who had devoted their lives to its cultivation ; of men who, by extensive learning, had formed their judgments on the knowledge of ages ; men who, in the highest offices of state, or in the common intercourse of social life, had from their infancy refined their taste, by that accuracy which their high offices require, and by the variety of characters which they have had an opportunity of examining ; men who, of necessity, must attend to precision of language, to an accurate choice of words, and who, of course, must acquire that delicacy of sentiment, which appropriates to each term its exact meaning, and fixes the limits to which in its application it ought to be confined.

If such a society can accomplish the great object which I have in view, what may we not expect from the institution which I now establish,

lish, composed, as it is, of members so respectable ? I esteem it no trivial glory, that, under my reign, so many noblemen of distinction, and men of eminence in the world of letters, have concurred in an enterprise, which promises to reflect so much honour on the Swedish language, and from which they will one day derive immortal fame. What may not the present age expect from an institution, illuminated in its origin by such a constellation of genius ? But how much more important is the judgment of posterity ? that posterity for whom you are to exert your talents ; who, neither dazzled by the false glare of partial commendation, nor deceived by the cloud of contemporary censure, will see, with a distinguishing eye, the real value of each man's abilities ; of that posterity, who, in the annals of the academy, will perceive the same names, which the records of the kingdom have consigned to the page of history ; who will observe, that the first \* of the Swedish senators, the first among the founders of a learned society, is also the first member of this academy—a place which he occupies not only as an admirer of the liberal arts, but as a most accurate judge of every thing connected with taste and polite literature.

NEXT to him may justly be mentioned, as a deserving member of a learned society, a senator † now absent, who, animated in the career of

\* The senator Count HOPKEN, one of the first founders of the Academy of Sciences at Stockholm in 1739, and first member of that of the Belles Lettres when instituted in 1753.

† The senator Count C. F. SCHEFFER.

learning

learning by that patriotic ardour which illustrates every action of his life, unites to the beauty of style the utmost delicacy of taste, and upon whose talents I should still further enlarge, did I not apprehend that the tribute of gratitude, which truth demands at my hands, would be thought a studied encomium upon him, to whom I am indebted for my education.

To unite, in an advanced age, the most social temper of mind and the most elegant taste for composition, with the direction of a political department, which requires more industry than abilities, more accuracy than genius—a department which appears even calculated to extinguish these qualities, is a singular circumstance, a circumstance which proves more powerfully than any encomium, how much that senator \*, to whom I now allude, is likely to ornament and instruct the academy. The effects of his genius, preserved in the transactions of the kingdom, have already procured him a reputation, which, however, he is desirous of sharing with this society.

No person, however, can have a better title to become a member of an institution, destined to purify the Swedish language, than a nobleman † who has so frequently addressed the general assemblies of the kingdom; who, with so elegant an arrangement, so luminous a perspicuity, and so irresistible an energy, has so often delivered his sentiments to his

\* The senator Count HERMANSSON, who was twice President of the Exchequer.

† The senator and field-marshal Count A. FERSEN, who has been three times Speaker to the Diet.

fellow-



fellow-citizens. You revive, my worthy nobles, those times of ancient Rome, when the most distinguished citizens united the culture of the liberal arts with the highest offices in the republic ; when, with the same voice with which they enforced the interest of their country, and with the same hand that signed the decrees of the senate, they enlightened their fellow-citizens, and not only adorned their language by the elegance of their own writings, but established its permanency on the certain foundation of unerring rules. What, indeed, is the purity of a language ? What is the beauty of style ? Is it not the expressing of clear thoughts in concise, strong, and perspicuous terms, to which ambiguous meanings cannot be assigned, and which exhibit sentiments in the same correct form in which they rise upon the mind ? Does not every man perceive the advantage which the public would derive from this accuracy, in whatever most essentially regards the interest and peace of society ? If treaties, conventions, and laws, were expressed in fixed, indisputable, and acknowledged terms, they would be no longer exposed to that obscurity, that doubt, those perpetual explanations, which often, to illustrate an obscure passage, entirely alter the wisest ordinances ; and how many examples have we of the inconveniences which such explanations introduce ! Our own annals will sufficiently exemplify this assertion.

WITH you, my worthy nobles, those gentlemen are this day united, who have both enriched and embellished the Swedish language ; and in the midst of an assembly, whose talents are consecrated to the eulogy of the national heroes and benefactors, and whose anniversary festival is to  
be

be celebrated on the birth-day of the great GUSTAVUS-ADOLPHUS, how can that man be forgotten, whose name will ever be inseparably united with that of the illustrious hero, whose death he has with such pathetic elegance lamented? a poet \*, who combines the truest accuracy of taste, with those graces of style, which his natural sensibility, his well-known probity, and his amiable talents for conversation, have enabled him to acquire.

THAT accomplished scholar †, who adorns with such elevated language those papers which issue from that office of the state which is under his administration, and who, in obedience to my commands, has written, with such truth and eloquence, the life of an aged and illustrious knight, who, commencing his career of glory under the ALEXANDER of the North, grew grey, and ended his days in my court: such an author has certainly the best claim to a distinguished seat in a society, the object of which is eloquence.

THE poet ‡, who, in so animated a strain, has celebrated the victories of CHARLES-GUSTAVUS; whose writings, for more than twenty years,

\* The senator Count T. G. OXENSTIERNA, First Lord of the Bedchamber to his Majesty; Grand Master of her Majesty's Household; author of an Ode on the death of GUSTAVUS-ADOLPHUS, and of many other pieces of great merit.

† Mr. de SCHRÖDERHEIM, Secretary of State; author of an Eulogy on Count LIEVEN, Secretary and Marshal of the kingdom.

‡ Count G. F. GYLLENBORG, author of an Epic Poem entitled *The March over the Bält*, of *The Man-Hater*, and many other valuable works.

have adorned the Swedish language; by becoming a member of this society, certainly confers upon it more honour than he receives.

THE interest of the academy could not have been better consulted, than by intrusting it to his care, who is the sacred depository \* of my future hope, and that of the nation; whose agreeable manner of communicating knowledge, whose extensive learning, and acquaintance with elegant literature, have gained him the esteem of foreigners, and have introduced him to that high confidential station which he now occupies.

To write history with truth and perspicuity, requires courage as well as learning; to render it elegant and useful, requires intelligence, philosophy, and taste. How extensive then are the claims of that member †, and what assistance may we not expect from his superior talents, who has already so far promoted the object for which the academy is instituted?

On this occasion, it is impossible to forget those two poets; of whom, the one ‡ has, with so much elegance, introduced the heroes of HOMER and EURIPIDES on the Swedish stage, and who has expressed, with such

\* MR. de ROSENSTEIN, Counsellor to the Grand Council of the Royal Chancery, tutor to the Prince Royal.

† MR. de BOTIN, Counsellor to the Exchequer; author of a work entitled *A Sketch of the History of the Swedish Nation*; and of another *On the Swedish Language, considered with regard to Conversation and Writing*.

‡ MR. ADLERBETH, Secretary to the King; author of the Tragedy of *Iphigenia in Aulis*, with choruses, performed in 1776; and of the Opera of *Cora and Alonzo*, represented in 1782.

exquisite

exquisite sensibility, the passion of CORA and ALONZO; the other \*, who, with all the energy of poetry, has invoked from the grave, if we may be allowed the expression, the patriotic spirit of GUSTAVUS VASA, has exhibited that illustrious hero, who more than two centuries ago rescued our ancestors from the galling yoke of civil and religious bondage, and brought him before our eyes, once more to receive the glad homage of the Swedish people.

Two respectable prelates, whom I have not the satisfaction of seeing upon this occasion, have a just claim to be ranked amongst the members of this assembly; the one †, at a period when history was a mere chronicle, has recorded, in a manly style, the exalted actions of GUSTAVUS ERICSON, and vindicated his son from the unjust aspersions with which his memory was stained; the other has ‡, with all the graces of eloquence, inculcated divine truth, and, by fulfilling, in the most exemplary manner, the duties of his important station, has essentially improved the language, and refined the taste of the nation.

FROM writers thus eminent, the Swedish language may expect a new and glorious æra. The object which we have in view, is not unworthy

\* MR. KELLGREN, private Secretary to the King, and author of the Lyric Tragedy of *Gustavus Vasa*, performed in 1786, with great success.

† DR. CELSIUS, Bishop of Lund, author of *The Histories of Gustavus I. and of Eric XIV.*

‡ DR. VINGARD, Bishop of Gothenburgh, no less celebrated for his Sermons on various subjects, than for his Funeral Oration on the Death of the late Queen Dowager.

the attention of those, who have sacrificed the whole of their time to the highest offices of the state. Nor am I destitute of other arguments, to justify an institution, which in itself possesses the utmost utility. I am not unconscious that there are some persons, who regard literature and the liberal arts as destitute of utility, as a species of luxury, which, being calculated only for the amusement of an effeminate people, ought to be banished from a manly and martial nation. Yet, what are the rewards to which the valiant aspire, if not to an immortal reputation? What probability is there that the deserving soldier would sacrifice his ease, and endure the invidious slander of his contemporaries, were he not supported by the hope, that an enlightened posterity would render justice to his fame? But how could this expectation be indulged, if no men of genius existed, to deliver down to futurity the eulogy of heroes? And, to an elegant mind, what duty more delightful, what occupation more worthy the leisure of the statesman, than to revive the memory of illustrious patriots? Who can more truly estimate the merit of human actions, and more justly represent them, than they, who, from their infancy, have studied purity of language; or than they, who, from a long acquaintance with the highest offices of state, have gained an intimate knowledge of the art of government?

To honour the memory of great characters, is to exhort their descendants to resemble them; it is to proclaim — Warriors, judges, statesmen, citizens! you who have inherited the names of heroes, or have succeeded to their rank, behold the tribute of gratitude which they receive from posterity, and render yourselves, if possible, worthy of equal honours:

your

your names must appear before the tribunal of future ages ; let not their lustre be obscured through your degeneracy ; it is in your power to render them equally renowned.

SUCH is the important trust which I now commit to your care. I have endeavoured to discharge my duty : it remains for you to fulfil yours. While you contemplate with attention the records of past ages, you will take care to keep in view the judgment of the future ; and this consideration will not a little enable you to deserve their applause.



A N  
O R A T I O N,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE SWEDISH ACADEMY,

ON THE TWENTIETH DAY OF DECEMBER 1786, THE ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE BIRTH-DAY OF

*GUSTAVUS-ADOLPHUS,*

B Y

M. DE ROSENSTEIN,

COUNSELLOR TO THE GRAND COUNCIL OF THE ROYAL CHANCERY, TUTOR TO  
HIS R. H. THE PRINCE ROYAL OF SWEDEN, PERPETUAL SECRETARY  
TO THE SWEDISH ACADEMY, MEMBER OF THE ROYAL  
ACADEMY OF THE BELLES LETTRES, HISTORY,  
AND ANTIQUITIES, KNIGHT OF THE  
POLAR STAR.





---

A N

O R A T I O N

B Y

*M. DE ROSENSTEIN.*

---

GENTLEMEN,

THIS day the Academy, for the first time, celebrates a festival, which, annually renovated, will annually present its enquires and decisions to a respectable public, whose judgment it esteems, and whose approbation it is ambitious of obtaining. Had the choice been left to us, gratitude without doubt would have induced us to have selected, as the epocha of our anniversary, the day on which the academy was instituted. We should by that means have enjoyed a desirable and well-chosen opportunity of presenting those oblations of veneration and love which we owe

D

to

to our august founder. But, since the commemoration of this institution has been confided, as well as the memory of many other great events, to the profound, though silent sentiments of grateful hearts ; since it is committed to the tardy, but just and durable testimony of history, whose voice will speak to the latest posterity, it is to be presumed that we shall not be refused the privilege of manifesting the gratitude, veneration, and pleasure, which animate our breasts, in beholding the æra of the foundation of this academy connected with one of the most happy and memorable days in the annals of our country, the day which gave birth to GUSTAVUS-ADOLPHUS. If, without incurring the reproach of self-complacency, we may be allowed to believe that an establishment, destined to cultivate a language of heroes, to excite the poet and the orator to immortalize the proofs of Swedish valour, to keep alive among us a taste for the sublime, the beautiful, the pathetic, the noble, and the natural ; if we ought to believe that such an institution is in some degree connected with the glory of our country, what name could more forcibly animate us to persevere in the pursuit of this grand object than that of GUSTAVUS-ADOLPHUS ? a hero who, among all nations, in all countries and ages, superior to the fluctuation of opinion, will preserve an everlasting claim to the admiration of mankind, and reflect on Sweden the most brilliant reputation. Where is the man, indeed, whose title to immortal fame was ever better founded than that of the heroic GUSTAVUS-ADOLPHUS ?—A monarch mighty among kings : though receiving a kingdom, distracted by dissensions, and surrounded by enemies, he transmitted it to his successors in perfect peace, aggrandized by his efforts, dreaded

dreaded by the neighbouring potentates, and respected throughout all Europe—A monarch mighty among heroes; not for having, like ordinary warriors, encountered dangers, triumphed over opposition, and surmounted difficulties, but because he loved justice, because his prudence was not lulled to security by success, because he was never intoxicated by prosperity, because his exalted spirit never submitted to the slavery of his passions, and because his exploits ended in restoring to the rights of mankind two of the most powerful empires on the face of the earth. In addition to this, he possesses a reputation peculiar to himself; a reputation which will last, even though at some remote period of time, amid the probable revolutions in the fate of empires, future generations should look with less respect on those events which have established a balance between the powers of Europe. He has the fairest claim to the honour of *invention*, of having given a new face to the art of war, and of ranking in the number of his pupils all the great commanders which this quarter of the globe has produced since that period. Is it necessary to add, that humanity, which shudders at the very name of war, cannot raise her voice to impeach the fame of a hero, whose example never instructed mankind to add to the perils and destruction unavoidable in war; that unjustifiable cruelty of conduct, which the want of feeling and a ferocious self-interest too frequently produce?

THE remembrance of this day has drawn me into a subject much beyond my feeble powers: but before I quit it, I must beg leave to improve the opportunity, by expressing a fervent wish—May the language and

the polite literature of the Swedish nation, under the auspices which it now enjoys, attain their summit by a progress as rapid as did our military glory in the reign of GUSTAVUS-ADOLPHUS! This is no presumptuous wish, if we recollect the advances which the Swedish language has already made, and if we advert to the present state of literature among us. We have instances, in which our language has expressed, with an energy worthy of Greece and Rome, and perhaps surpassing every modern language, the most bold, sublime, and generous sentiments of liberty. We have heard it, by the irresistible power of eloquence, dissipate prejudices, convey truths, suppress one sensation, excite another, subdue inveterate antipathies, recal unanimity; warm, excite, transport; and, by its varied and yet united effects, infuse into the mind acquiescence and conviction. We possess compositions of the utmost excellence in point of lucid order, force, depth of thought, chastity of expression, neatness, harmony, elegance, and variety of style. Some are distinguished by that vigour, and that precision of genius, in which the ancients excelled, and which the moderns have found so difficult to attain. It is worthy of notice, that the authors who have charmed the public most, are those who have had the least occasion to adopt foreign expressions. Our poetry, we can assert without partiality, is in a higher degree of perfection than the poetry of most other nations at the period when they began to cultivate their language. The epic poem, the ode, the drama, evince that the Swedish language is sublime, masculine, pathetic, flexible, and sonorous; while our philosophic poems prove it energetic, ingenious, clear, and expressive. In *Atis* and *Camilla* (it is allowable to cite this masterly performance,

formance, since its author is no more), the fire, the impetuosity of love, the language of sentiment, the riches of nature, and the power of beauty, are felt and acknowledged. In other poetic compositions, tenderness, vivacity, sportiveness, and warmth, have united with terms the most expressive of delicate love, of refinement, of raillery, and of mirth. Our satire is not destitute of point, our tales are not wanting in elegance, nor our fables deficient in a noble simplicity of style. If some branches of Swedish literature remain still uncultivated, if several have not attained to maturity, we have every reason to hope that the period of their perfection will soon arrive; since the experience of history informs us, that genius never fails to flourish when fostered by the dew of royal munificence.

It is not, however, as a collective body, that this academy can expect to enrich our language with those masterpieces which are still wanting to our literature: such works can only be produced by the fire and force of a single genius. But if, among the members of this learned society, some appear, who have received from the hand of nature superior abilities, who, from a knowledge of men and an acquaintance with books, have acquired a solid taste, and have been encouraged by public approbation—by what new degree of force will they be animated, when incited in the career of glory by him to whose hands the nation has committed the task of rewarding merit? Should even the glory of arriving at the sublimest heights of Parnassus be reserved to no person of our number, yet we cannot deceive ourselves when we presume, that the recompenses we distribute may one day excite a genius, who shall reach the point  
which

which we have as yet been unable to attain ; that the situation which we now occupy, and the advantages which are attached to it, may operate on that genius as powerful motives to double his activity, to repel the insults of ignorant contempt, to vanquish despair, and to prevent his yielding to disgust at the sight of that injustice which so frequently discourages the rising talents of men of merit. Some, indeed, from the impulse of their irresistible mental powers, and actuated by a consciousness of their own abilities, have dared and surmounted every obstacle. But how much greater is the number of those, whose talents have been crushed under the pressure of distress, or whose genius has been buried in oblivion ! What class of men require more encouragement than men of letters ? What is the end and object of their toils ? It is not gain, except as far as an unequal distribution of riches induces the poor to consider as wealth that which merely suffices to supply the exigencies of life. Still less is it their object to arrive at court promotion, which to them must be unsolicited. Is it then fame ? Undoubtedly. But from whom do they expect it ? from their contemporaries, or from posterity ? If they aspire at the enjoyment of reputation during their life-time, at what an exorbitant rate must it be obtained ? How many vexations and disappointments are they condemned to undergo ? They must oppose a spirit of pride, which beholds every surrounding object with infinite contempt ; they must encounter ignorance, which affects to judge of what it does not understand ; they must combat with prejudice and narrowness of mind, whose characteristic is selfishness ; they must be vulnerable to envy, which delights in calumniating merit, and to levity, which sacrifices every thing to the temptation

temptation of a jest. The idle of every kind, who wish to augment their own number, deny the utility of literature; and the effusions of genius are exposed to the decisions of that class of men, who, moving in a more exalted sphere, affect to regulate the opinions of others, but are themselves too enervated to feel, too much distracted to reflect before they pronounce sentence, too little alive to the pleasure of existence to be capable of amusement, or, if roused for a moment from their lethargy, soon revert to their wonted indifference, and repeat their usual decision, equally short and equally judicious—*What tedious stuff!*

I DIVERT with pleasure your attention from a picture which happily will not in future find an archetype among us. The opening prospect of Swedish literature is highly agreeable; and our functions would be equally so, were they confined to the obligations of contributing, according to our abilities, to the progress of literature, to the encouragement of rising genius, and to the task of exploring and honouring those who have arrived at a maturity of merit. But we have another field to cultivate—a field, the thorns and briars of which would soon deter the courage of a single genius—a field which the public cannot cultivate, because they could never agree on the manner in which it ought to be improved, and which a single man could never clear, because he would be perpetually exposed to the mistakes of prejudice and self-love. You cannot but perceive, gentlemen, that I speak of that grammar, which the academy is directed to compose. The difficulties attached to this labour need not be recapitulated to you, to whom they are well known; nor to the enlightened



lightened public that surround us, who are too equitable not to see that much time will be required before a work of so much difficulty can be carried to perfection. But, what affords to me, who am one day to consign to the annals of history the labours of this society, the greatest pleasure is the conviction I entertain of your zeal for the public good, your aversion to all usurped authority, your design to establish your decisions on the basis of the most correct criticism, and to commit their truth or fallacy to the touchstone of argument and reason.

IF on a future day we should be happy enough to establish, on a solid basis, the orthography of our language, the certain principles and rules of composition, and to procure to the Swedes what they are still in want of, a complete dictionary—shall we then have acquitted ourselves of all that the public have a right to expect from the Swedish academy? No, gentlemen, the honour which our society has of being distinguished by the national name, imposes upon us duties of a permanent nature. We are bound to the utmost of our power to maintain the genuine character of the language, which, like the nation, is masculine, bold, elevated, and serious. We are bound to exhibit in our works an example of respect for religion, for the government, for the nation, and for morality; to prevent, as far as depends upon our activity and influence, youthful genius from being deluded by the *ignis fatuus* of fugitive fame, and sacrificing to the ambition of wit, the interest of religion, the sentiments of decency, and the duties of a citizen.

CONVINCED

CONVINCED of your earnest desire to devote yourselves to your several duties, I have here taken the liberty of sketching them to your view. One still remains, of all, perhaps, the most difficult ; I mean the preservation of taste. What is taste ? Where are the judges of taste ? Is it the public ? The public are liable to be seduced. Were it not so, taste would be privileged from corruption. Is it the race of authors ? They are subject to errors and mistakes ; and their blemishes serve frequently to mislead others. Shall it be a society ? Who has invested them with a right, which no sovereign can assume ? Is it an individual ? Who has conferred this honour upon him ? The foundations of taste are, however, not the less certain ; and her temple rests upon two immoveable pillars—Feeling, which invents without the aid of reflection, and Reason, which subjects every thing to her enquiry. But it will be alledged, that feeling and reason are not unfrequently at variance with each other. I will, however, venture to assert, that they are never so much in opposition as not to be easily reconciled, except it be amongst those, whose exalted opinion of their own abilities prompts them to prefer their own individual taste to the sense of the public, and their own sentiments to the sentiments of others. Amongst different nations, we may indeed discover a difference of taste ; but all enlightened countries agree in the essential principles. An individual, who should take his own caprice for a guide, may be disgusted with VIRGIL ; another may condemn OVID as too frivolous, and blame BOILEAU for his frigidity ; a third may condemn QUINAULT, because he is effeminate : but the majority of genuine connoisseurs will ever read with pleasure and admiration the *Æneid*, the *Metamorphoses*, the

E

works

works of BOILEAU, and the *Operas* of QUINAULT. It must indeed be allowed, that writers of a bad taste have frequently found readers, and even admirers : but posterity has never failed to condemn their works to eternal oblivion ; and their names are known only by the victorious pleasantries of contemporary critics.

PERMIT me, gentlemen, to make one observation in this place, which time will not, however, permit me to develop at full length. The history of letters evinces, that the false taste which has preceded the brilliant ages of literature, has ever been eradicated by the true ; but that after a purity of taste had triumphed for some time, a bad taste, different from the first, began to insinuate itself, increased by little and little, and at last obtained an evil ascendancy.

THE literature of this country has not yet arrived at that point, from which, according to the ordinary fate of human labour, a fall is to be feared. But are we therefore exempt from danger ? It must not be dissembled, that the cultivation of the *Belles Lettres* amongst us commenced at a period later than with other nations, who, on account of priority, have acquired in some degree the right of serving us as models. But if amongst some of these nations the corruption of taste be already commenced ; if a people, whose compositions have been praised for purity of taste, exquisite elegance, and simple grace, begin already to degenerate into a style affected, turgid, and disgraced with quaint conceit and far-fetched ornaments ; if a nation, distinguished by vigorous thoughts and energetic

energetic expressions, exhibits no longer its ancient, masculine, and nervous taste, and has at the same time the mortification of seeing that in several countries abroad writers pretend to resemble their celebrated authors, by imitating their defects and their singularities; if amongst another nation, who have proposed nature and the feelings of the heart as the principal objects of their literature, authors should be found, who are accused, not unjustly, of having overcharged their images and expressions; if all these defects really exist amongst those nations, ought it not to be our first care to preserve ourselves from the contagion of their example, and should we not be careful to examine whether any of those blemishes begin already to infect our literature?

I AM not presumptuous enough to decide the question; but I will only ask, Have we always been careful to distinguish our own feelings from the sentiments which we may expect to excite in others; the sense which we may attach internally to our expressions, from the sense in which the same expressions will most probably strike our readers; and our own self-complacency, from the approbation of the public? Have we never mistaken an empty prodigality of exclamation for the language of passion, confusion for genius, obscurity for depth, and bombast for sublimity? Have we always well examined what additions the prevailing thought and principal sentiment will bear, without being weakened and concealed by the accessory expressions, which should only serve to throw a greater light upon the first, and to give more life to the latter?

Who shall reply to these questions ? If we address ourselves to literary men, we shall find them divided in opinion : but if, in order to decide this question, we call to our assistance an art, which has the most exact resemblance to the *Belles Lettres*, at least to poetry, the painter will inform us, that he is permitted to conceal on the canvas a part of the thought, but that it is never allowable to mislead the spectator by glaring colours and false light. If we consult nature, she will instruct us that the passions have a tone which excites an emotion proportioned to their energy ; but that this tone becomes disgusting and unpleasant, if raised too high. Nature also tells us, that the Alps excite admiration, not when clouds conceal them from our view, but when the excursive eye meets with no obstacle but the towering immensity of the mountain. As for us, there is another mode of deciding the question : it is to regard with diffidence our own opinion, and to turn our eyes to those immortal works, which, consecrated by the unanimous approbation of successive ages, of various nations and periods differing in character, have acquired a right to be regarded as the models of genius and taste.

# OBSERVATIONS

ON

TASTE AND POLITE LITERATURE,

DELIVERED BEFORE A GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SWEDISH ACADEMY,

*DECEMBER 20, 1787,*

BY

M. DE ROSENSTEIN,

COUNSELLOR TO THE GRAND COUNCIL OF THE ROYAL CHANCERY, &c. &c.

## A SUMMARY OF THE AUTHOR'S PLAN.

*A View of the Fluctuation of Opinion respecting the Belles Lettres, of which, however, the Author contends, the Principles are as certain as those of the Generality of Sciences.—Objections to the Tendency of Polite Literature considered.—Different Theories concerning them.—A middle Plan proposed.—The Advantage which may be derived from a theoretical Knowledge of elegant Learning.—An Answer to some Objections against the Effects of Literature on Society.*

---

# OBSERVATIONS

ON

TASTE AND POLITE LITERATURE,

BY

M. DE ROSENSTEIN.

---

IF the opinions of mankind are unstable, wavering, and contradictory; if two persons, whose manner of thinking perfectly coincides, are as difficult to be found, as two whose features have a perfect resemblance, there seems at first view to be no subject, to which this observation is more apposite, than to Taste and the *Belles Lettres*. There are sciences, which, founded on the clearest evidence of our senses, are certain not only in their principles, but in their consequences. There are others, in which experience has rendered at least some truths indisputable. History, which  
rests



rests on the veracity of testimony, becomes certain, when this veracity cannot be called in question. The abstract sciences, it is true, which pretend to elevate our meditations beyond the compass of the senses, have not seldom partaken of that distraction which too commonly infests the minds of those who cultivate them. By fixing the memory of words, and by marking the boundary where enquiry should stop and ignorance be acknowledged, Philosophy however has been able to evince, that the various opinions which prevail among mankind, arise from terms rather than from things. If certainty has not hence been attained, a limit at least has been placed to conjecture, subtilty, and confusion. Placed in a rank too elevated to be subjected to the investigation of an ignorant and unreflecting multitude, the sciences are in general not exposed to their rash and injudicious decisions. The success of these superior branches of study has depended upon enlightened minds, whose contests, though disgraceful to literature, yet, as they are conducted by a systematic chain of reasoning, and rest on fixed principles, may possibly admit of being reconciled.

Of all these advantages Polite Literature appears on the first view to be destitute. Though calculated to excite the best feelings of the human heart, the imagination is subject not only to the criticism of mankind, but to what is still more vague and changeable, their humours. By these standards decisions are given. Sensibility ought to be a sure guide : yet how variable are the feelings of men ! On different persons how different their effects ! How many schemes have been put in practice to stifle their voice, and to mislead their dictates ? Do they not themselves

themselves frequently require the direction of reason and experience? How much, consequently, do the judgments of mankind differ respecting works of taste? One man condemns what another praises: what some deem worthy of fame, others consign to oblivion. The individual frequently differs from himself: youth is enchanted by that, which loses part of its influence in maturer years, and in old age becomes unpleasant. A whole nation adores an author who is despised by another: though deified in England, SHAKESPEARE is ridiculed on the other side of the Channel. To the taste of Europeans, authors are disgusting who excite the veneration of Oriental nations. A work, which in one century has obtained the highest encomiums, in the next is scarcely known, or if known, it is only to be contemned.

THE changes also which taste has undergone, seem to afford another argument against the certainty of its principles. How numerous are the judges who pretend to decide on subjects of taste? With respect to mathematical works, the value is determined only by mathematicians. Though in the practice of their art, physicians are compelled to suffer an unworthy competition, yet their writings are not criticised, except by those who possess some knowledge of medicine. The philosopher is either not read, or read only by philosophers: should uninstructed readers attempt to peruse such an author, they are generally polite enough to conclude, that his work, though above their comprehension, may possibly possess truth and utility.

F

FAR

FAR from experiencing the same degree of candour are the votaries of elegant learning ; for who does not esteem himself sufficiently qualified to judge of what is beautiful, sublime, and pathetic ? The *Belles Lettres* are destined to amuse : whoever, therefore, is in search of amusement, will condemn a work which deceives his expectations. It would be in vain to plead the utility of such a performance ; a quality which even the most finished works of taste are hardly allowed to possess. With the utmost freedom every one praises and condemns : hence BOILEAU was prompted to say, and of the votaries of elegant learning he said truly, that every author is the slave of the purchaser of his work.

IN opposition, however, to this true picture of the destiny of the *Belles Lettres*, another equally true may however be exhibited ; a picture which appears to destroy the arguments already advanced.

BEHOLD the fame of HOMER, VIRGIL, and HORACE—of DEMOSTHENES and CICERO—of THUCYDIDES, LIVY, and TACITUS, resting on the foundation of ages, unshaken by any hostile attacks, victorious even over ridicule, that most formidable of all weapons which can be directed against genius.

FREQUENT those theatres where mankind meet to be delighted, where the emotion of one insensibly kindles sympathy in the breast of another, where praise frequently precedes judgment. Find an audience, if there exist such a one, which has nature for its guide, whose object is pleasure,  
whose

whose averſion is dulneſs ; who think it no diſparagement to follow the dictates of the heart, nor affect by criticiſm a ſtudied parade of genius.

OBSERVE this aſſembly diſſolved in tears at the fate of *Britannicus*, the grief of *Andromache*, the danger which threatens *Iphigenia* : behold them appalled with terror at the alarming ſituation of *Merope* : ſee them glowing with patriotic zeal and the love of liberty, while they liſten to the generous ſentiments of *Emilia* and the elder *Horatius* : obſerve them petrified with horror on beholding the dreadful cup in which *Atreus* preſents to *Tbyeſtes* the blood of his unhappy ſon.

REMARK alſo the triumphs of the Comic Muſe, and obſerve the ſame aſſembly making the vaulted roofs reſound with ſhouts and acclamations at the exhibition of *Harpagon*, or the Miſer, *Jourdain*, *Diaſorius*, and *The Learned Ladies* : attend to the univerſal burſts of applauſe, when, after expoſing the folly of an author's reciting his compositions in public, *Vadius* draws from his pocket his own verſes : obſerve a ſimilar effect, when *Francaleu* miſtakes for a mere theatrical representation a real interview between a father and ſon. Who is ſo inſenſible as to be a ſpectator of the character of *Ariſte*, the Hypocrite, or the Boafter, without at once imagining himſelf on the great theatre of the world ?

TRUTH is the life of all, and thence the beautiful and ſublime derive their force ; and, whether pleaſed in the cloſet, or raviſhed in the playhouſe, by the maſterpieces of CORNEILLE, RACINE, VOLTAIRE,

F 2

MOLIERE,

MOLIERE, or PIRON, which of you can refuse to these authors a perfect knowledge of the human heart, a brilliancy of genius, beauty of style, and a taste purified and correct ?

OF the power of eloquence among the ancients we are not ignorant. We remember DEMOSTHENES by his oratory arming a pusillanimous and enervated people, extorting admiration from a rival while he drove him into exile : CICERO governing a turbulent and wavering multitude, and melting to compassion and forgiveness the obdurate purpose of CÆSAR himself. At so considerable a distance of time, under circumstances so different, the speeches of these immortal orators still produce impressions which preserve their fame unrivalled in the estimation of those whose imaginations can transport them to the assemblies of Greece and Rome. Can any one fancy himself living before the battle of Cheronæa, and peruse the Oration of DEMOSTHENES against PHILIP, without forming an ardent wish to behold Athens declare war against the Macedonian Conqueror ? Who, in reading TULLY, is not the partizan of MARCELLUS ?

WITH less frequent and less considerable opportunities for exertion, modern eloquence often displays striking proofs of its efficacy. So deeply affected were the auditors of BOSSUET at his Discourse on the Death of the Dukes of ORLEANS, that after pronouncing the words, “ the Prince is no more,” he was obliged to pause for some time, to allow to the tears and sighs of the assembly an undisturbed utterance. The  
melancholy

melancholy vicissitudes of worldly bliss, pomp, and glory, are exhibited in such a pathetic view in this masterly night-piece, that it cannot be contemplated without exciting congenial emotions: nor can the eulogy, consecrated by the same sublime genius to the memory of the great CONDE, be perused without venerating the character of the hero and the exalted genius of the orator, without experiencing feelings equally strong, though opposite, in contemplating the dignity and the insignificance of man.

AMONG free nations, in the assemblies of the people or of their representatives, eloquence frequently produces effects not inferior to those which were exhibited in ancient times. At the reconciliation of jarring opinions, unanimous applause has often confessed a power operating upon mankind more strongly than prepossessions, more effectually than self-interest. It is unnecessary to recur to foreign countries, to exemplify an assertion attested by our own annals and our own experience.

IN reading the pathetic speech of the first GUSTAVUS to the states of the kingdom, do we not burst into tears as warm, and breathe forth blessings as fervent, as those excited by that great monarch, when for the last time he addressed the Swedish people. Eloquence, the sceptre of GUSTAVUS-ADOLPHUS, supported the throne of CHARLES-GUSTAVUS. By eloquence, STENBOCK, a name worthy to rank with that of kings, inspired courage into husbandmen, converted them into warriors, and obtained relief to the kingdom from those very hands which discontent and avarice seemed determined to close.

ON

ON our own experience I am not permitted to dwell, convinced that the feelings of this assembly render every illustration unnecessary \*.

OF the universal energy of literature many other proofs might be adduced. Authors might be mentioned, who are perused with fresh delight by every nation. From most of the branches of elegant learning examples and illustrations might be adduced, were I not confined to the most

\* It has been observed, in a miscellany entitled *Melanges de Litterature Suédoise*, published at Paris in 1788, that the first Swedish poets have ever been found among the first order of the State; and we may also remark, that since the accession of the house of VASA, eloquence has been inseparable from the name of GUSTAVUS.

It was eloquence, which, raising GUSTAVUS-ERICSON from the rank of a private gentleman, placed him on the throne; it was the eloquence of VASA which rescued Sweden from foreign tyranny, and which, since that propitious period, has not ceased to be the tutelary genius of that kingdom. Of this GUSTAVUS III. has afforded more than one striking proof, especially when at the Revolution, which he effected in 1772, he declared with energy, that he aspired only to be the first citizen of a free nation:—GUSTAVUS, for whom the secret and insidious attempts of an ambitious neighbouring Court, by endeavouring to revive the hydra which he defeated in 1772, have served only to prepare materials for new triumphs.

His illustrious brother, CHARLES, Duke of Sudermannia, crowned with the youthful glory of a victory obtained over the valour of the veteran GREIGH, returned from the boisterous fields of martial renown, to restore tranquillity to a no less stormy ocean at home. After having given his fellow-citizens proofs of valour, he gave them also an example of loyalty. By a speech distinguished for its nervous simplicity, he infused into the bosom of his audience the patriotic flame that burns in his own. He exemplified QUINTILIAN's observation, that the heart is the only source of true eloquence †.

† *Pectus est quod disertus facit.*

Remark of the Translator.

remarkable

remarkable. Those impressions only I have pointed out, which, being fleet and volatile, stand in need of a certain principle, to become general and lasting. I have omitted observations respecting general taste, as they would carry us into researches of a nature too abstruse for the present occasion.

BUT how shall we account for the opposite forms in which this subject presents itself? In one view so much certainty, so much doubt in the other. By what means shall we reconcile the consonant sentiments of nations with the diversity of their taste; the unaltered admiration with the varied judgments of ages; the uniform effects recorded, with the opinions maintained in conversation respecting the invincible authority of fashion? What shall we say to the carpings of critics, to the condemnation of the unfeeling, to the remarks of the ignorant, to the exaggeration of enthusiasts, and to the cold precision of philosophers?

PERHAPS, concluding at first sight that these contrarieties are irreconcilable, we shall regard taste and literature either with that careless indifference, that wavering uncertainty so easily adopted by the unthinking, or by that systematic scepticism which philosophers find it so difficult to avoid. Most of the disputes upon this subject, I am however willing to hope, might be prevented, and some degree of certainty obtained, if, by investigating the causes of variance, those which constantly operate were distinguished from those derived from ignorance, prejudice, and folly; if, by fixing the meaning of words and ideas, we could trace opinions to their source.

A SENSE



A SENSE of the utility of such a design has prompted me to attempt a subject, which, although accurately investigated by foreign writers, seems not, in our own country, to have met with the attention it deserves. Since, as secretary to the academy, I am, on solemn occasions, permitted to deliver my sentiments before so respectable an assembly, that privilege, I presume, cannot be used more agreeably to my fellow academicians, than when, under the guidance of those models, which they have thought worthy of consulting, I endeavour to discriminate the grand principles of taste, and to determine the degree of certainty of which they are susceptible.

IN executing this design, I discharge at the same time the most delightful of duties, by expressing the gratitude of the academy to its august founder and generous protector, as this cannot be more forcibly exhibited than by procuring esteem for pursuits which he vouchsafes to encourage. This esteem must be supported by certainty and conviction. Though perpetually exposed to deceit and error, man, thirsting after truth, cannot rest from painful research till he arrives at some undoubted conclusion. The most enchanting pleasures vanish, when we begin to disbelieve their principles. On the least suspicion of fallacy, our adoration is converted into contempt. Behold that idol, to whom with profound veneration the prostrate million look up : destroy the persuasion of its divinity, and suddenly the mighty god will change to a shapeless block of marble, and not a single worshipper will approach his desolated shrine.

IN

IN the course of my experience, I have met with many who affect to despise the enthusiasm of literature. The thoughtless and insensible ridicule pleasures which they cannot relish ; by sneer and ridicule they endeavour to console themselves for praises which provoke their envy, and thus endeavour to stifle that secret and uneasy feeling which is excited by a consciousness of their own imbecility. Men of sense often deny their applause to works of genius, because destitute of that truth and certainty, which they think alone entitled to their esteem. Philosophers I have seen guilty of the same injustice : those philosophers I mean, who, assuming, without really deserving that honourable title, mistake for a knowledge of human nature a cavilling disposition ; who, incapable of deriving from philosophy the advantages it is able to produce, know neither how to praise nor to condemn with impartiality, ignorant as they are, that there are few objects which do not in some degree merit the attention of a sage. Politicians also have thought it their duty to condemn elegant learning as useless and injurious to society. More than one PLATO, more than one JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU, have wished to banish literature from their republic ; though few have had the address to turn against the object of their proscriptions those burnished arms of rhetoric, which those celebrated writers received from the arsenal of those very arts which they affect to despise.

IT would be a trespass upon your time to bestow on ignorance arguments intelligible only to candid minds. But since I venture to defend the study of literature, it will be proper to answer some objections offered

G

against

against its nature and tendency. This will be the more requisite, as it will afford me an opportunity of entering more minutely into the spirit of so interesting a science.

By mentioning science, a word which many will think improperly applied, I am apprehensive of exposing this subject to one of the most formidable objections, its want of a solid foundation. Knowing no certain principles, it is alledged, by which to estimate the merit of a single work of taste, how much less shall we be able to establish a general theory for the fine arts! Though with a view to effect this, numberless works have been written; though in all ages, mankind, speaking of a general taste, have endeavoured to point out its rules; though a modern nation has given to this science a new appellation\*: yet many, I doubt not, regarding such attempts as frivolous, deny the reality of a general taste, consider rules rather as the shackles than as the guides of genius, and ridicule that credulity which cagerly grasps at a shadow. Let it however be our endeavour to pass a more equitable sentence.

PREVIOUSLY to define Taste and Polite Literature would be inconsistent with our intentions. If the essay which I meditate should be fortunate enough to find readers, at least they shall not accuse me of obtruding my own opinions. Aspiring to nothing further than to direct the reader to exercise his sensibility and judgment, I shall only premise, that,

\* The Theory of *Belles Lettres* and the Fine Arts is called in Germany *Ästhetik*, i. e. applying to the feelings.

inde-

independent of other qualities, Polite Literature eminently possesses the power of pleasing, and that Taste is the faculty which enables us to judge of that power.

THOSE who have written concerning Polite Literature and Taste in general, have pursued two very different paths.

FROM works of genius, possessed of an established reputation, some authors have deduced rules for composition ; supposing that admiration will always attend upon what has acquired applause, and regarding decisions already pronounced, as documents for the formation of our sentiments, by an attention to which we may anticipate the opinions of succeeding ages. Without seeming to have entirely forgotten that an unerring judgment can only be derived from an intuitive knowledge of nature, they have in general trusted too implicitly to the authority of human opinion. It is, however, by a close attention to nature alone, that a person can learn to animate his own writings, or to read with instruction the works of others.

REMOUNTING to this source of genuine science, others indeed, by an appeal to nature, have fixed upon this as the only criterion by which to decide upon the talents of authors, and the taste of readers.

OF these two modes of judging, the former has necessarily preceded the latter, which is doubtless the most reasonable. Both, however, are liable to extremes.

By representing compositions of acknowledged merit as infallible models for imitation, exclusive rules have been constituted, which, warping the powers of the mind, instead of giving them freer scope, clip the soaring pinions of fancy, stifle all vigour of sentiment, and smother the flame of genius. Hence arise critics, who, equally useless to the world, and injurious to literature, check the rising talents of youth, imbitter the pleasures of maturer years, and seem only calculated to deprive readers of that satisfaction they would otherwise feel, and authors of that fame which too commonly is their only recompense.

Those, on the contrary, whose endeavours have been always directed to discover in the human mind the principles of taste, have written in a manner often totally destitute of that taste which they pretend to define, characterized by didactic dulness. Such works have prompted youthful genius to turn disdainfully aside from instruction, which could neither elevate the fancy, nor interest the heart.

To some favourite models the one party sacrifices experience, the other to systems ; the one despises groundless and exceptionable rules, the other rejects principles and consequences because inapplicable.

ERRONEOUS extremes thus exhibited, will, doubtless, to reflecting minds, suggest an intermediate mode of judging, partaking of the advantages of both, and free from the inconveniences of either. At once philosophical and elegant, this method may, with classic models, unite  
investigation,

investigation, reasoning with feeling, a veneration for works of extraordinary merit with a still greater veneration for truth, rules with those exceptions to which every rule is subject, and laws with the freedom of genius, the ardour of sensibility, and the soarings of imagination.

BUT of a science thus constituted what will be the nature? How shall its principles be defined? Will they admit of a scientific stability?

THIS science, I reply, will resemble every other species of human knowledge, in so far as it is the united result of industry and observation; a combination of experiments, with few reflections, few conclusions, and still fewer rules and principles. By giving to Polite Literature such a philosophical theory, a successful writer may deserve the appellation of a philosopher of taste. Far from such a man be that systematic superciliousness, which, benumbing the faculties of the mind by synthetic chains, oppresses sensibility with the yoke of argument. Though reasoning analytically, may he never be unmindful of the source of all knowledge; that volume, which, well studied, would, by rendering most other books unnecessary, be more destructive to many learned libraries than the desolating fire of merciless barbarians.

THAT great volume is experience, and of this experience we ourselves are the principal subjects. All nature operates upon our senses, whether beautiful or tremendous, majestic or mild, gay or awful. Ideas are created in the human mind by the impressions of external objects; these  
ideas,

ideas, arranged into various groups, independently of the general name of science, acquire a particular appellation, according to their respective combinations. Within our own breasts exist riot and rage, boisterous passions, which, breaking forth under various forms, give birth to so many virtues and vices, to so many noble and mean actions, and which generate or dissolve human societies; passions which ought to animate the ample page of history, and which the law should restrain by punishment, or by an adequate reward direct to proper objects; passions which policy should use and govern, morality check and dignify; which poets and orators should delight to paint, to awaken, or to soothe. Within our own minds reside those tender emotions, those delicate feelings, which afford the richest colours for the pencil of genius.

IF then nature, not with regard to its inanimate qualities, but to its power of operating on the human mind; if the feelings, emotions, and passions, be the originals which the votary of taste should perpetually keep in view; if fine writing be nothing else than a knowledge of the art of pleasing, a power of feeling and of judging, whence, except from the perceptions and faculties of the human soul, shall we trace the theory of taste and composition?

THE first and surest method of acquiring this knowledge is, to look with a scrutinizing eye into our own breast. Here we find predominant inclinations, tumultuous passions, and gentle emotions; we observe hidden sparks of genius, which, though seldom blown into a flame, supply  
an

an inexhaustible fund of valuable materials to those minds which possess the talent of employing them to the best advantage.

To judge by our own experience of the attainments of others, and to measure their dispositions by our own, is frequently fallacious and unjust. With the study, therefore, of ourselves, should be joined the less certain, but more easily acquired reflections, which an attention to the conduct and deportment of others enables us to form; for, perceiving in others feelings that are wanting in ourselves, we learn to reduce to their real value our own sentiments, to try them by a standard authorized by society, to elevate or sink them to a degree capable of being communicated to the others. Hence we are taught how to command conviction, and to shake the soul.

FROM the instruction which private society affords, we advance to a wider field of information, opened by the world and history. The contemplation of different nations and different ages enlarges our conceptions. Enabled to extend our influence beyond surrounding objects, we acquire the means of earning the veneration of mankind in future times.

UPON this immense stock of knowledge the man of letters may graft the theory of an art, which sensibility and genius qualify him to exercise, but which should always be directed by an enlightened taste. On the same basis, though on a different plan, the lawgiver, statesman, and moralist,



moralist, build their systems. Hence, we presume to say, that the knowledge of Polite Literature and Taste may acquire a degree of certainty almost equal to that which belongs to morality, politics, and legislation, or to any science relative to human nature.

FROM this intimation, it may be expected that I ought more precisely to determine the nature and limits of the present design.

THESE expectations can be answered only in a hasty and imperfect manner, in the introduction to a treatise, which was merely intended to contain general observations upon certain parts of this science; as I am resolved to deduce conclusions from genuine principles alone.

IN what should the theory of Polite Literature consist, but in its being a picture of the impressions which nature makes upon our senses; our feelings, emotions, passions; and of their power of exciting approbation or disgust, pleasure or pain? It is the art of discriminating the various tastes of different nations, ages, ranks, and persons; an enquiry into the means of affecting the mind with delight or admiration. The groundwork of the whole is the knowledge of mankind, derived from a comprehensive experience. By affording matter for investigation, elegant compositions, and the history of polite learning, will exercise the judgment, and give an idea of particular and general taste. Not intended as legislators, great authors will serve only as models and guides.

IF

IF any one, however, imagines that such a theory will terminate all differences of opinion ; if he thinks laws can be established, by which authors may infallibly be taught to please universally, and to escape the shafts of criticism, neither this subject nor my plan has been sufficiently understood.

DOUBTS and disputes will ever exist respecting the liberty of human opinion. A thorough knowledge of these disputes and of their origin, however valuable an acquisition, is not sufficient. Principles alone, duly ascertained, will enable us to form equitable judgments, to approve at least what we do not highly admire, and to give every author his due tribute of commendation. Diffidence in maintaining our own sentiments, and respect for those of others, will be the result of this theory. Anticipating the effect of their works, authors may foresee when they will be generally read, or when an attention to them will be confined to a certain class of mankind. Consoled by the applause of some for the disregard of others, they will not pant for an unattainable degree of fame, but direct their views to a degree of perfection which may ensure to them the esteem of an enlightened posterity.

THOUGH subject to several defects, this theory ought not on that account to be despised, since all other sciences are in some measure liable to the same objection. Morality will serve us for an example. In this important science is there nothing controvertible ? It ought to be founded on fixed principles : but these are only determined by reason

H

and

and feeling, which frequently contend for victory. Are these principles powerful enough to compel nations, or even individuals, to think and act alike? Can they bind opposite characters by the ties of affection and friendship? Will morality ever be able to appease the perpetual contest between honour and duty; between private and public obligations; between imperious opinions and restricting laws; between humanity pleading for pardon, and social order demanding vindictive punishment; between that justice which examines the motives of an action, and that which considers its legality and its consequences? Can moral science create estimable qualities without their attendant failings? Has it ever formed a completely virtuous character? or has it only been able, by shewing the origin of contrarieties, to render enlightened persons equitable in their judgments and in their conduct; some few, as perfect, or rather as little imperfect, as human nature will admit? Yet, who will say that morality should be treated with distrust or neglect?

BUT allowing the possibility of a theory of Polite Literature, to what purpose, it may be asked, will it serve?

THIS question may be expected from those, who have observed many persons, possessed of a theoretic knowledge of composition, who yet were incapable of a single flight of genius, and destitute of taste; while others, though unaided by learning, by the sole guidance of nature, decide with accuracy, and even compose with elegance.

HAVING

HAVING already in part answered this objection, as I wish not to impose my opinions as authorities, the rest of my reply I will reserve, till my reasoning shall coincide with the conclusions of the reader. A few observations, however, may not be improper; especially as they will be supported by examples from arts, of which mankind judge less vaguely than of the *Belles Lettres*.

IN observing that nature opens an inexhaustible store for the votaries of Taste, I own that genius, by its warmth and brilliancy, and sensibility, by her irresistible energy, can alone enable an author to infuse his own feelings into the breasts of others. That no degree of knowledge will compensate the want of feeling, I have also allowed. The man to whom nature has denied genius, she has also forbidden to cultivate elegant learning with success. To the man to whom she has denied feeling, she has no less denied the power of judging of the feelings of others. But ought we thence to conclude that genius and sensibility authorize contempt for the aid of experience? What, indeed, is any science and theory, except the result of our own experience, assisted by that of others. Never losing sight of life and manners, true genius studies mankind, nature, the world, and works of great merit, in the same manner as an artist contemplates animate and inanimate creation, and the works of those masters who have most successfully imitated both. Without that imagination, that happy enthusiasm, which stamps on works of fancy a lasting character, the painter and statuary would never acquire fame: yet, how unsuccessful would be their efforts, without an unremitting diligence to acquire dex-

H 2

terity,

terity, without a steady attention to obtain a thorough knowledge of nature, without that finishing elegance suggested by the rules of art, the advice of connoisseurs, and the examples of eminent masters?

IN the qualifications of the artist are described those of the man of letters; his attention, occupied by nature, should follow theory as a guide; the example of others should supply the deficiencies of his own experience. Seldom are theory and practice distinctly ascertained. In applying what has been said of authors, to readers, or mere judges of literature, I cannot but express a wish, that these would shew a still greater share of diffidence in deciding upon works beyond their own abilities to produce.

THUS, having described the science from which I propose to deduce the principles of this subject, I have rather pointed out the eminence to which others may attain, than that to which I myself presume to aspire. In shewing the sources from which this theory must be derived, I have merely sketched its outlines. To present a full display of the different branches of elegant learning, is not my intention: but, by diffusing some general ideas of taste and composition among my young countrymen, I hope to exhibit to them a source of fresh delight, and to guard them against passing an unfair judgment upon those who rather deserve an equitable sentence, as their ambition frequently aims no farther than to the instruction and entertainment of their readers. Though in consulting those profound authors, whose insight into human nature has enabled them

them to penetrate into the deepest recesses of the heart, and to unfold all its secret springs, I propose to extend my enquiries as far as possible ; yet I mean to advance nothing but what is clear, and calculated to inform. The sciences indeed require their truth to be established by deep investigation : every candid philosopher will however acknowledge, that the most abstract reasoning never struck out any useful discovery, which was not almost instantly adopted by the plain understanding of all, who were not bewildered by systems, or blinded by prejudice. The first duty of an author is to be intelligible, the next to be explicit. If a first-rate genius is thought entitled to diffuse opinions which require explanation, a claim to such a privilege must appear ridiculous when supported only by the desire of singularity. Though resolved to confine myself to general observations, yet I perceive that the extensiveness and difficulty of this arduous task will render it impossible for me completely to define its nature, or to point out its precise limits. Both admitting of considerable alterations, there is no part of this attempt to be ascertained, except the defects it will doubtless exhibit. Independent of a still more important object, various occupations will, it is hoped, plead for the imperfections of the performance.

I CANNOT lay down the pen, without replying to one of the principal objections against elegant learning ; an objection which has already been mentioned in alluding to those who consider Polite Literature as useless, and even pernicious to society.

THEY

THEY give birth, it is alledged, to effeminacy, and consequently to a corruption of morals which threatens nations with political ruin.

WERE I in any degree persuaded of the truth of this assertion, I should be culpable in defending the study of elegant learning. Could I see with indifference my readers imbibe such an opinion, I should be regardless of my own reputation, of the fame of that society of which I have the honour to be a member, and of truth, the most valuable of all possessions. It would require a separate treatise to reply fully to every argument on which the above objection is founded. A few observations will be sufficient for my purpose, if they should prompt others to decide a question, which it is my humble office only to propose.

FROM the four following sources are derived those arguments, the grounds of which I venture to deny :—the examples recorded in history ; a comparison between those periods in which polite learning has flourished, and in which it was unknown ; the very nature of elegant learning ; and the dispositions and conduct of those who are devoted to its pursuits.

EXAMPLES deduced from history I mention first, well persuaded that they have long and powerfully supported the cause of error. There is not any thing, of which mankind have been more ignorant, than of the science of social life. The imperfections incident to every form of government I do not arraign. How indeed could perfection be attained,  
without

without mature consideration ; and who can expect mature consideration in works produced by the fortuitous course of events, by the tyranny of circumstances ? Among the ancient states, Sparta alone could boast a legislation connected in all its parts : yet, by militating against the strongest propensities of human nature, the Spartan laws excited a perpetual conflict, that ended in the destruction of that country. The governments at present subsisting may be aptly compared to Gothic edifices improved by the hand of taste.

It may be observed, that a prudent extent of territory, a comprehensive experience, and an industrious pursuit of happiness, have contributed more to the public and private advantage of mankind than the most admired laws of the ancient legislators. There still, however, subsist so many fundamental defects and errors, so much opposition between different parts of the same system, that no modern form of government can be considered as a just model for imitation. Venice will perhaps be pointed out as an exception ; a republic of which the constitution has survived its greatness, and a material change in the sentiments of the people. But what a constitution ! Equally unshaken, Oriental despotism has a higher claim to antiquity.

NEVERTHELESS, history has long been considered as affording examples for the construction of forms of government. Athens, Carthage, and Rome, are objects of enquiry in France, England, and Sweden. Elevating their voice, philosophers have at length ventured to ask, if  
France



France be Athens, England Carthage, or Sweden Rome. Is it not, however, often asserted, that after having lost her simplicity, frugality, and poverty, Sparta was no more ; that Athens, by encouraging public spectacles, ceased to conquer ; instead of a MILTIADES, an ARISTIDES, a THEMISTOCLES, she had a MENANDER, a PLATO, a DEMOSTHENES ? Charmed with the eloquence of CICERO, the poetry of VIRGIL and HORACE, the Romans supinely neglected their country's freedom. Alarming examples these ! alarming, indeed, for governments like these ! But other causes sufficiently account for the destruction of liberty.

By the frantic rage of conquest, every small community must fall a victim to its own weakness, every extensive monarchy a prey to its own grandeur. The love of peace will not shield the former from the attacks of an ambitious neighbour, unavoidable necessity compels them to combat, to conquer, or to perish. A political truth this, which will throw some light on the ruins of ancient governments.

THE Lacedemonians, designed by LYCURGUS to be protected by valour, from equality and poverty to derive peace and contentment, to possess independence by ruling only over themselves ; these people lost their strength, when, instead of preserving a system of self-defence, they committed hostilities upon others ; engaged in war with a superior force, they soon ceased to be independent ; their happiness was alike destroyed by the consequences of victory or of adverse fortune. Athens found it impossible to support undiminished that vigour of mind, that heroic valour,

valour, which, on the field of Marathon, and on the shore of Salamis, enabled a handful of men to vanquish armies numerous beyond the experience or the belief of modern times.

THAT the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, was the inevitable consequence of its extravagant ambition, who can question? But why have not those acute reasoners, who pretend to trace events to their causes, shewn, whence proceeded the destruction of those states, on whose ruin Rome raised her Collofean greatness? Was it luxury and elegant learning which destroyed the Sabines, the citizens of Veji, the Volscians, and the Latins: or did not their own weakness abandon their destiny to the chance of war? Imperious Rome herself had, more than once, nearly seen falsified her real, or pretended dreams of eternity.

WITH these events literature had not any, or at most a very slight connection. To elegant occupations Sparta paid little attention; nay, if destitute of poets and orators, Athens would have fallen like Sybaris, Capua, and unlettered Carthage. Had Rome erected her vast monarchy, without subjecting Greece; in all probability, Rome would have been little acquainted with polite learning; but, most certainly, her power, like that of Persia and Macedon, must have declined.

BUT should the influence of elegant learning be allowed to have been injurious to ancient states; at present, however, it cannot be considered in that light. This, the history and constitution of modern governments will sufficiently evince.

THE polite subjects of LEWIS XIV. were warriors not less courageous than the ruder Germans and Spaniards, whom they opposed. This monarch, the patron of polite learning, like AUGUSTUS, riveted, it is true, the fetters of slavery on the nation: yet, at the same period, amidst the flourishing growth of science and elegant learning, the English fixed on a firm basis, their admirable constitution.

How little the destiny of ancient governments ought, at present, to excite our alarm, every reflecting mind will easily perceive. Extent of territory and power are more equally distributed; envy and fear, the centinels of the strong, prove the guardians of the weak: restrained by finance, war is less calculated for conquest, than for defence; knowledge is applied to the advantage of society. Without opposing the moderate claims of the human passions, their excess only is consigned to punishment; the demands of liberty seek an equality in natural, rather than in acquired, privileges; rather private security, than political pre-eminence. An uniformity of conduct will then secure modern governments against all those calamities, which flow not from foreign and external causes. But, perhaps, I have examined, too minutely, an argument which the more intelligent adversaries of literature, will not very strenuously defend.

“ To enforce our reasoning, we need not, they will alledge, have recourse  
 “ to history, nor exhibit instances of extreme danger, to shew the necessity  
 “ of condemning the effects of elegant learning. It is enough, if man-  
 “ kind be more effeminate, more criminal, than in former times. If,  
 “ from

“ from our own degeneracy, we have reason to expect a progeny still more  
 “ corrupt than ourselves; is our improvement in knowledge to be con-  
 “ sidered as advantageous? By giving new play to the affections, have  
 “ not the pursuits of elegant learning, materially contributed to produce  
 “ the evils of which we now complain?”

PREVENTED, as I am, by a want of leisure, not by a dread of the weight of my opponent's arguments, from replying at large to objections, on the minds of many very deeply impressed by the deluding colours of eloquence; yet a concise view of the progress of society will evince, that no comparison has been made between the advantages and evils; that, if a change of manners be a calamity, it is an unavoidable one; and that a mere effect has been preposterously mistaken for a cause.

AMIDST the variety of human conditions, there is none which can boast advantages, unconnected with disadvantages. These, on the contrary, will seldom be found unalleviated, if we set aside the unnatural situations of despotism on the one hand, and of slavery and oppression on the other. The state of savages, their gradual progress in civilization, I forbear mentioning. It will not be necessary to refute those, who delight in declaiming on the felicity of barbarism, if it be considered with what difficulty savages provide for their sustenance, what ceaseless hostility they exercise against each other, and that languor clouds, and frequently shortens their monotonous lives.

TAUGHT to depend no longer for subsistence on the destruction of animals, or on the spontaneous productions of the earth, but obliged to cultivate the ground, mankind fixed on a determinate spot, though not without danger of being expelled by invaders more powerful than themselves. Such a situation the dawn of society presents to our view : but how gloomy is yet the prospect ! Turning our eyes from states destroyed in their infancy ; from nations, either long since buried in their ruins, or still groaning under oppression, let us, excluding circumstances merely casual, and attending to general causes, contemplate some of those people, who have passed through all the several stages from barbarism to refinement.

AFTER the means of subsistence are provided, the next desire of man, is for personal liberty. Disdaining the bonds, which prevent mankind from employing their faculties for the promotion of their happiness, liberty does not desist from her claims, till all unnecessary restraints are removed. Property once secured, produces inequality of circumstances ; inequality, affording a scope to man's natural propensity to ease, engenders luxury, a subject productive of much contention among philosophers and politicians.

THIS natural progress of society, is frequently retarded or accelerated, by accidental causes. These causes exhibit a people, struggling under internal or foreign restraint, regaining lost freedom, again sinking under a superior force, until at length human nature becomes impatient of bondage, and every thing recovers its stated course. Amidst these different situations,

tions, national manners, depending on the different degrees of civilization, will undergo material changes. At first, rude and barbarous, then simple and unpolished, afterwards enlightened, lastly arriving at the highest pitch of politeness, mankind become prudent in their conduct, delicate in their conversation, and refined in their sentiments.

FROM this ordinary progress, there will, however, be deviations. A people exerting all their force to defend or enlarge their territory, display actions wonderful, laudable, and frequently honoured with the name of heroism. But this enthusiasm soon subsides. At other times, happy or untoward circumstances have an extraordinary effect. To such a degree of corruption the morals of men may arrive, the human mind may become so debased and effeminate, so willing to submit to the first yoke which shall be imposed, as to allow despotism to annihilate every idea of public virtue.

HENCE it appears, that the changes, which take place in society, are of two kinds: either proceeding from accidental causes, or inevitably derived from the very nature of civil communities.

IF the former be productive of greater inconveniences than advantages, they may properly be arraigned, as requiring redress. The latter, no wise man will censure, nor attempt to place barriers against the uniform and irresistible course of nature. Those countries which possess the largest share of freedom and security, the sage will consider as the most happy; as the  
least

least imperfect that system of laws, which imposes the smallest constraint upon the human passions. Without dwelling on defects and inconveniences, which flow from the very source of virtue, he is persuaded, that, in all ages mankind, bearing a strong resemblance to each other, are ever actuated by the same motives: ambition, envy, and self-interest. The predominance of certain virtues or vices, occasions a diversity of manners. The most estimable virtues, however, result from that state of society, in which mankind have obtained the valuable right of seeking happiness without injuring each other, and have secured this important right by established laws.

THESE observations are sufficient to disprove the answer to the censure, which has been thrown on modern times and modern manners.

IF we have clearer ideas of the rights of human nature, of the origin and aim of society; if already influencing the conduct of sovereigns, and the laws of nations, these ideas procure a more tranquil enjoyment of advantages natural or acquired: surely we have no reason to look back with an eye of envy on former times. If more humane and reasonable, more benevolent and social, our manners flow from the natural progress of civil society: then is every complaint against them as unfounded as it is insignificant. We are evidently, therefore, advanced to that degree of civilization, at which it was expedient that we should arrive; nor could its attendant inconveniences be removed, without introducing still greater evils.

How

How little the ancient states are calculated to become examples to the modern, has already been demonstrated.

HAVING thus endeavoured to answer objections, by which this subject has been obscured, I may now be permitted to investigate the nature of polite literature, and its peculiar influence upon society. This, perhaps, ought to have been my first object. But prejudice, opposed by truth, resembles a citadel, assaulted by a superior force: when its outworks, the principal strength, are once broken down, its entire destruction is easily accomplished.

THE first idea, suggested by the Belles Lettres, demonstrates them to be rather the consequence than the cause of the manners of mankind. By civil society, the mind must be prepared to receive their impressions. INACHUS, CECROPS, and DANAUS preceded AMPHION, LINUS, and ORPHEUS, who also, it is said, spoke only to the ear. Before HOMER could address the fancy, what further progress must not society have made! Elegant learning depends on the degree of civilization, no less for its gradual advancement, than for its first rise. Though since the revival of letters, the valuable remains of the ancients engage the attention of modern nations, their taste is formed essentially by internal causes. The character of the people, for whom an author writes, must be studied by him, if he wishes to seize the heart. The prevailing sentiments of a nation have a considerable influence upon individuals. Hence the connexion, observed between the genius of a people and their taste. That every material  
change



change in the civilization, manners, and sentiments of mankind, has had a proportionate influence on their taste and literature, I shall endeavour to evince. Uncommon flights of genius must, however, be excepted, which soaring beyond the bounds of the present age, contribute to form the taste of posterity.

THE political causes which principally influence the manners of a nation, create and perfect the Belles Lettres; these, in their turn, are not destitute of effects, for in the moral world, effects re-act upon their causes. Before the question be examined whether the influence of elegant learning be useful or injurious, the nature of this influence ought to be ascertained.

OF some few, the entire attention is devoted to polite learning: In others, by employing those vacant hours which can be spared from business or trivial pursuits, polite literature becomes a rich source of innocent pleasure, opens a large field for imagination, quickens sensibility, extends the knowledge of human nature, refines the sentiments, destroys grosser attachments, and gives birth to a more delicate choice of amusements, to more exquisite recreations, to a more enlightened intercourse. Inaccessible to all but men of science, many truths have, by the help of elegant learning, been generally diffused; and from the superiority of the objects of its enquiry, the human understanding has increased its penetration. And can it be imagined, that such effects would be injurious? No, it is answered, not so much, on a superficial survey, as they will appear on a more accurate inspection. The pleasures of imagination are often indulged to an immoderate

derate degree; by refinement conversation becomes less sincere; the Belles Lettres, administering amusements which lead to vices, and often exercised on criminal subjects, prove the causes of effeminacy, and the corruptors of manners.

THERE is nothing, however excellent and laudable it may be, that is not subject to inconvenience, and liable to abuse. Without entering upon a new defence of our present political and moral situation, I shall content myself with referring to what has already been said respecting the necessity of that situation. When we reflect, that the *Belles Lettres* cannot flourish except amongst a people who have arrived at a certain degree of ease and opulence, the surest mode of ascertaining whether they are useful or pernicious, will be to compare two nations placed on the same degree in the scale of civilization, one of which cultivates the polite arts, and the other neglects them entirely. Polite literature and the sciences mutually assist each other. It is difficult to arrive at the latter, without passing through the former: it would be madness to think of attaining the sciences, while the study of the *Belles Lettres* was proscribed. It is physically impossible, that the human mind should expatiate in the vast field of intellectual exertion, while so absurd a barrier is opposed to our progress. The only difference between science and the polite arts is this, that the first acts more upon the understanding, and the latter have a greater influence on manners and the conduct of life.

K

LET

LET us then imagine to ourselves, as I have already observed, two nations enjoying an equal portion of security and welfare ; in each of these nations will exist the same degree of sensuality and luxury, and thence in each nation will arise the same defects and the same vices.

BUT if one of these nations was destitute of elegant learning, unsusceptible of any refined pleasure, and solely addicted to sensual enjoyments, it would soon become the victim of indolence, cowardice, and effeminacy. Such has been the fate of those nations, which, without knowledge, have obtained power. Of this the Persians, Macedonians, and Turks, are sufficient examples. A similar destiny will be experienced by those people who, without attending to the cultivation of their minds, enjoy merely the conveniences of life. The European colonies are proofs of this assertion.

ON the contrary, in another nation, equally powerful and prosperous, the culture of elegant learning will produce congenial sentiments of patriotism. Independently of the diffusion of useful knowledge, polite literature excites and cherishes moral feelings, which, by restraining sensual pleasures within proper limits, excite and encourage men of talents, by the hopes of immortal fame. This is a motive, which, on the first repose of Rome from the yoke of despotism, animated the genius of TACITUS and PLINY ; and which, preserving for a time the ancient grandeur of the empire, rendered less precipitate the fall of the Roman world. This argument will obtain additional force, by considering European nations, which,

which, with forms of government nearly similar, possess different degrees of knowledge.

IT remains, that I should mention those faults which have been objected to the votaries of taste; faults scarcely deserving notice, when urged as serious reproaches.

THE charms of poetry, it is alledged, have been prostituted in fulsome flattery upon the most unworthy monarchs. But we certainly ought not to charge poetry with its abuse. Was the sovereign, who admired and rewarded flattery, ever destitute of sycophants? To the princes who have despised or neglected literature, flatterers have not been wanting, not even to CALIGULA, who profanely wished to destroy the works of Virgil. LEWIS the XIV. has perhaps been too highly praised: but LEWIS, really great, was instigated by praise itself to noble actions. In the same age, BUTLER and DRYDEN, were allowed to languish in poverty, by CHARLES the II. while he supported ministers who encouraged his effeminate indolence, and courtiers who entertained his voluptuous levity. Let us view mankind as they are. Few form their own characters: those of the generality arise from circumstances. Between flattery and elegant learning there is no close connection: on the contrary, the first and most natural effect of the Belles Lettres, is to elevate the mind. But when found to be the road to preferment, adulation will alike be pursued by the indigent, the ambitious, the scholar, the courtier, and the warrior. In such a situation, men of letters deserve our utmost pity, as the monuments of

their genius perpetuate their dishonour. Happy the author who can safely utter truth, and who is sufficiently spirited to exercise that valuable privilege.

THE most enraptured votaries of learning, who are blessed with a fruitful and ardent imagination, are unqualified, it is affirmed, for those duties of life which require reflection: their behaviour is generally singular, and their restless mind is the sport of unruly passions.

BUT of this remark, liable to so many exceptions, what is the inference?

IT proves only, that mankind should follow the impulse and direction of nature. If they feel a strong incitement to elegant learning, why should they resist its pleasing influence? In obeying the dictates of nature, they are most likely to be useful to themselves and to society; and the fire of genius, instead of being injurious, will animate them to the pursuit of knowledge and virtue.

FAR, therefore, from being condemned, the culture of elegant learning ought to be highly encouraged. The leisure which they have devoted to the Belles Lettres, will not be regretted by those who regard them merely as an amusement; they will hence learn to arrange their thoughts, to give dignity to the passions. Capable of procuring for themselves a sublime and heart-felt satisfaction, they will despise the noisy pleasures which

which captivate the croud. Those who feel themselves impelled to devote their principal attention to polite learning, will not fail of an adequate reward.

IF the Belles Lettres afford a necessary aid to science; if they polish the manners, mitigate or diminish the pernicious effects of prosperity; if they communicate pleasures frugal and profitable; if they brighten the gloom of solitude, and comfort the heart in the hour of affliction; if, by instilling the love of virtue, they elevate the mind to patriotic sentiments: then must their votaries not be accounted useless members of society. Then may they condemn the railings of ignorance and prejudice, and expect the esteem of every liberal mind. From an enlightened government they have a right to protection: from posterity they may promise themselves that fame which they deserve.

## DISCOURSE



**D I S C O U R S E**

**DELIVERED IN THE SWEDISH ACADEMY,**

**B Y**

**N. L. S I Ö B E R G,**

**ON HIS ADMISSION, THE 13<sup>TH</sup> MAY, 1787.**





---

# DISCOURSE,

BY N. L. SIÖBERG.

---

GENTLEMEN,

**H**E whom you have condescended to honour with a seat in this society, consecrated to merit, and to talents, has not the advantage to possess that warm and profound sagacity, nor that animating eloquence, which distinguishes genius. Nature has limited his faculties to a mere admiration of external and intellectual beauty, of useful and exalted talents. This is all, perhaps, that will be found in the few lines which he has written, and of which some have been so fortunate as to attract your notice, and to obtain your approbation.

L

How

How much will he, who formerly regarded not himself as one of the favourites of fortune, be stimulated in the career of letters, by the honour of an admission into a society, composed, as this is, of men the most distinguished for genius and abilities, which the Swedish nation can boast ! He will certainly regret no longer the time which he has consumed in the cultivation of polite learning.

PERMIT me, Gentlemen, on this occasion, to recall to your memory some of those illustrious characters, by whom genius may be said to have been introduced into the world.

THERE have been nations more ancient than the Greeks, who possessed science ; but, to the boast of genius, no people can establish a prior claim.

HOMER is the greatest prodigy in the reign of genius. In no man did the poetic fire burn with equal constancy. In other writers the flame of genius is only visible by intervals. The major part of even their most masterly compositions, is filled with the play of words, with quaint points, with all those inferior graces, which can never reach the sublimity of genius ; but those ebullitions of a poetic fancy, which agitated other authors in the composition of their best works, appear, in the breast of HOMER, to have operated as an uniform principle. If this be true, he was the most fortunate of men. In other writers it is too visible, that the soul, which animates their works, is not that principle which actuates  
the

the whole of their conduct. It is only by extraordinary efforts, that they can be elevated above their daily sphere of action. The cause of this is obvious. Conversation with other men is, at present, the principal object of all our studies. In order to please the multitude, we must resemble them ; and in the efforts of a vulgar ambition, the fire of genius will consequently be extinguished. There is reason to believe, that HOMER, ever transported beyond himself, or removed from the circle of common life, had very little intercourse with his contemporaries. His two poems, the noblest monuments of human genius, appear to have been written, from first to last, without effort, as if they had been dictated by some superior intelligence. There is reason to believe, that they would have appeared, even had the human understanding never been able to comprehend them. HOMER seems to have appeared on the stage of existence, to produce the Iliad and the Odyssey, and then to expire.

A NATION, which had HOMER for the founder of its literature, might have been expected to have been favoured by the perpetual residence of the Muses, did not the continual fluctuation of human affairs, did not the destructive ambition of the spirit of war, forbid the hopes of immortality to all the works of man.

ALL the geniuses of Greece discover, in their productions, some shade of the Homeric pencil. Those of the first order exhibit the boldness of his invention, the sublimity of his outlines, the fertility of his imagination, and that noble contempt of insipid accuracy which distinguishes his works; those

of the second order discover the simplicity of his style, the graces of his narration, and his skill in giving interest to the most familiar scenes of nature, and to the most common events of human life.

SOME heaven-favoured writers we have seen, whom nature had placed next in degree to that immortal bard ; they had the courage to enter the lists with him, they tried their force, they failed, they committed to the flames their verses, and were content to transfuse into prose the soul of their great master. Hence the source of eloquence.

THE language which HOMER employed, acquired under his plastic hands, almost all the powers and grace of which it was susceptible ; it became the richest, the most sonorous, the most picturesque, the most majestic, that ever was uttered by mortal man.

THE happy direction which HOMER gave to the genius of the Greeks, remained unaltered till the destruction of their empire. Never did any other nation unite qualities so opposite : To a courage which was invincible in dangers, an inflexibility of determination, not to be shaken by adversity ; they united the most ardent susceptibility of pleasure, and the most refined taste for voluptuous enjoyment ; to the keen subtilty of logic, they added the most profound penetration ; a florid imagination was accompanied by the most engaging simplicity of style. To the most extensive designs, and comprehensive views, they joined that spirit of discrimination which descends to the minuter graces. They had all that amiable vivacity which  
enlivens

enlivens conversation, without that insupportable vanity which generally attends it; nor, amongst them, was that spirit of liberty and independance, which arises from a sentiment of conscious merit, disfigured by that severity and pertinacity of opinion, to which it is too often attached.

BUT where now are those heroes who subdued? Where now are those sages who enlightened the world? Why have a people disappeared, who possessed within themselves all those great qualities which might have been expected to have eternized their empire? Unhappy Greece! thy melancholy lot should strike with terror every nation of the globe! What force, what talents, were like yours adapted to brave the efforts of all-destroying time? Ignorance, barbarism, and slavery, now occupy that soil which was once the abode of genius, of liberty, and of heroism. Under these superb, but now desolated, porticoes, which once were the resort of the poet, who was meditating a new Iliad; of the philosopher, who was engaged in a new system of the world; of the hero, who was concerting the destruction of the Persian monarchy; now, alas! wanders the ignorant and lazy ALBANESE, regardless of the sacred ruins that surround him, and only solicitous to escape the ravages of famine, and the fury of the sword. The fountain of Castalia, once honoured by the visit of Apollo and the Graces, no longer profusely bestows those celestial transports, which ancient bards quaffed from that unsullied source. A scanty stream that oozes muddy from the ground, is all that it now yields to quench the thirst of the barbarous inhabitant. Parnassus, where, armed with thunder,

Jove

Jove descended to shake the world, is now the retreat of wild beasts ; and the distinguished spring, Helicon, is itself covered with thorns.

SINCE, however, it was ordained by fate, that Greece should experience a master, it was still, in some degree, fortunate for that country to pass under the yoke of Rome. Had the Carthaginians, or the Numidians, subjugated the Greeks, the barbarian victors would have burned their writings, destroyed their monuments, proscribed their sages ; the genius and wisdom of Greece would have been overwhelmed in general ruin, and consigned to everlasting oblivion. From how slender a thread is sometimes suspended the fate of the universe ! Had the Carthaginians vanquished the Romans, polished and lettered Europe the Mistress of the World, might have been at this day as vile and barbarous, as Negroland itself.

The Romans made themselves masters of the literature of the Greeks, no less than of their empire. VIRGIL, HORACE, OVID, immortal names ! propagated the glory of LATIUM, farther than the victories of CÆSAR, of SCIPIO, of PAULUS EMILIUS had been able to pervade. But after the reign of AUGUSTUS, a set of monsters filled the Roman throne. From their cruel aspect, the Muses fled. Amidst those tyrants, however, arose the scourge of tyranny, the immortal TACITUS. He is one of those men, in whom indignation was the parent of genius. He lived in the midst of those human butchers, and he would have been their victim, had they possessed sufficient penetration to recognize the man,

man, who was destined to immortalize their infamy. Fate had placed him in a situation peculiarly advantageous to the exertions of his talents. On every side the most hideous vices, and the most sublime virtues, provoked the burning energy of his pen. The Roman empire was convulsed by the alternate struggles of freedom and of slavery. The minds of men had begun to recover from that consternation, into which they had been thrown by the victories of CÆSAR, and the policy of AUGUSTUS. The greater part had degenerated, not only from the dignity of freedom, but were even degraded below the level of slavery itself: but in some bosoms the Roman spirit burned with unabated fire. These opposite dispositions exhibited a striking contrast; but an instructive spectacle to a mind like that of TACITUS. Hence he learned to appreciate man in all his various relations of public or private life. His works cannot be denominated history. But that form appeared to him the best adapted to collect, in a body, his profound observations on the human mind; the labour of many years. He wrote a thousand years ago, and yet, with all our philosophy, with all our moral discoveries, we cannot boast of having carried farther than him the knowledge of human nature. He must have possessed almost supernatural sagacity to anticipate, as he has done, the experience of ages. The reflections of TACITUS contain the germ of a new system of ethics, as well as of legislation. To understand TACITUS, a certain portion of genius is required. MACHIAVEL, GRATIAN, LA ROCHEFOUCAULT, MONTESQUIEU, HELVETIUS, are writers whom he has created. Although he did not assume the pen to flatter by happy turns and pleasing images the apathy of the human race, whom, perhaps,



perhaps, he despised; yet there exists not a writer so interesting. Did a man embrace in his memory the literature of the whole world, still would TACITUS be new to him. Without obscurity, natural or studied, he affords his readers the grateful pleasure of pausing at every phrase to discover his meaning. But it is only in his native tongue, that we can prove this pleasure. All the modern languages of Europe are too methodical in their movements, and too strictly limited in the meaning of their words, to admit his poignant equivoque. TACITUS offers almost as many thoughts as words. It is this laconic and concise style which his disciples, the great and immortal authors whom I have just mentioned, have imitated. But they have also imbibed a portion of his spirit; they have dared to utter grand and extraordinary truths: but the light of truth is yet too resplendent; our eyes are still too weak to bear her lustre.

THE remembrance of victories vanishes with the disasters which they occasioned; systems of philosophy incessantly succeed each other, and fall in their turn: but the master-pieces of polite learning remain, because the emotions of the heart, and the sportiveness of the imagination, are eternally the same. O, Rome! time has, indeed, sapped thy threatening walls, fire has devoured thy extensive palaces; thy magnificent statues have mingled with the dust; thy formidable armies, like thin vapours, have disappeared, and the pomp of thy triumphs have left only an empty noise in the world: but the immortal labours of thy genius have braved the ravages of time, the force of flames, the fury of barbarians,

barians, and still survive in spite of the uncertainty of human glory.

THE Barbarians could not destroy the influence of the Italian climate, which inspires a taste for polite literature, and a tenderness of soul. But I pass over the ages of ignorance, and direct my hasty steps to thee, O Tasso, poet sublime and picturesque! In whose life we see the model of what most men of genius are fated to undergo. The profound, impetuous, and eternal flame of love which consumed thee, thy imagination ever active which still impelled thee to objects unknown, to new creations; the inveterate persecution of fate, the obstinacy of thy countrymen in refusing to acknowledge thy merit, and in fine, after the melancholy period of thy days, thy name increasing in fame, and spreading wide in glory; every circumstance of thy life, in short, proves thee a genuine votary of the God of genius.

Tasso gave to the Italian language an energy, of which from its softness it did not seem susceptible; and to poetry an elevation, which the then predominating quaintness of style appeared to counteract. That tender and plaintive tone, that taste for magnificence, that luxuriance of brilliant images, and that predilection for fairy scenery which distinguish the Italian poetry, were introduced by Tasso.

M

In

IN our days Italy produced a man of the first rank in the empire of genius \*, but death interrupted him in his career of fame perhaps before his genius was completely mature. Sweden possesses his ashes, and our language preserves a portion of his genius. He admired our King, he loved our country. Educated in the language of the most artificial softness in Europe, he delighted in the simple graces of our tongue. He has enriched our literature with two excellent morsels of eloquence.

THE literature of France has the reputation of possessing the most classical taste, and the advantage of the most general reception. RACINE, the greatest genius of that country, had the art of rendering himself agreeable to every class of readers, and is become the literary legislator of his nation. The genius of RACINE is truly French. It would be difficult to succeed in France with a genius different from his. Few men have written with the grace, the purity, the harmony which ennoble the writings of this author. He who is not charmed with his composition, is an alien to the Muses. He never overcharges the passions, never forces them beyond the bounds which nature has prescribed; he is ever noble, ever true. He is an eminent example of the force, the grace, the sublimity of which the genuine feelings of the heart are susceptible.

\* The Abbè MICHELESSI, who died at Stockholm in 1773.

RACINE

RACINE determined the structure of the French language. He endowed it with regularity, harmony, purity, and neatness of expression.

IN the flowery paths of letters, FONTAINE is the legislator of France. There he has never been surpassed, never indeed equalled by any writer. Literature is naturally divided into two kinds, the serious, and the gay. In the latter there are but few degrees of perfection. He who has not attained the most eminent, may be said to have done nothing. In this species of writing a man is born with all the excellence he can ever attain. The desire of elevation would be an impediment to his success. To excel in this line of composition, a man must absolutely have no other pursuit. He whose heart is but slightly touched by any passion, he who pants for fame, or who permits the cares of this world to trouble his repose, will never become a FONTAINE. This writer considered himself as placed upon the earth merely to respire the breath of life, and to sport the happy follies which occurred to him in his careless progress through the world. The least informed characters might have conversed with him all his life without suffering his derision, and the wittiest of mortals would not have excited his admiration. He was wholly unconscious of his powers. Never could he be persuaded to think himself of any weight in the world of letters. His works cost him nothing. Hence he regarded them as trifles, and believed, with the greatest simplicity, that others did so too. He treated as a folly of extravagance and folly, the assertion of a person, who preferred his fables to those of Æsop and of Phædrus. Such a man was very far from suspecting, that his

writings were the glory of French literature, and that his name was an honour to his country.

FONTAINE is the consolation of those, who have not the gift of invention. He has proved that without it a person may in a certain degree be a great genius. He has surpassed those who invented the subjects of his pen.

FONTAINE has endowed the French language with the graces of an engaging simplicity and amiable gaiety, which no tongue ancient or modern has in an equal degree obtained.

AMONGST the successors of RACINE some have nearly approached his pitch of excellence : but FONTAINE remains unrivalled.

THE author who displays the greatest energy in the French language, is certainly JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU, the most moving, the most eloquent of all writers. This man alone gives a superiority to the present age above all that have preceded. He who feels the instinct of genius, will thank his destiny for delaying his birth till the period that produced JEAN-JACQUES. He was one of those men, whom Providence sends at different periods among the human race, to support the dignity of their nature. Happy it is for humanity, that a man of his extraordinary powers has consecrated his eloquence to the cause of virtue. Arrayed in the charms of his enchanting style, he can never henceforward become the object of derision

rision or contempt. If a man should suddenly become immoral, if he should break all the bonds of society, to center his whole existence in mere self, still he could never become insensible to the force of ROUSSEAU's genius, nor elude the fascination of his eloquence. He had in view in his works a more sublime object, than any preceding philosopher : which was to reconduct man to his primitive simplicity of manners. But so far removed from that happy state did he find the human race, that several years spent in painful researches, could scarce enable him to discover the man of nature. He conceived him happy and amiable, and lamented that the efforts of a hundred ages had only served to remove him farther and farther from the path of felicity.

THE language of Rousseau will ever be the predominant language of Europe. Other languages may excel it in point of force, or of harmony, of flexibility or copiousness, but still they will never be the language of JEAN-JACQUES. To the most uncultivated language ROUSSEAU would have given celebrity. It is with languages, as it is with geniuses ; the most luminous may remain concealed for want of a skillful hand to introduce them into light.

ROUSSEAU has the admirable art of stealing into the bosom of his readers. He appears to have studied the disposition of every individual. He who seeks only for solidity of reasoning, will find it in ROUSSEAU : he who reads merely to be amused, will be fascinated by his style. The moralist regards him as the apostle of virtue : and the decent disciple

ciple of EPICURUS has him ever in his hand. He resembles the rainbow which, according to NEWTON, varies its colours with the varying optics of different spectators.

OF all authors ROUSSEAU is the greatest favourite of the ladies: a proof that the most sublime flights of genius are not above their capacity, provided the author neglects not to sacrifice to the graces. The fair sex delight in the writings of ROUSSEAU; because, for the honour of nature, he is of all the learned the least ostentatious of erudition.

IN casting a slight glance on the literature of England, we are struck with astonishment at the croud of geniuses which appear. It seems like traversing ancient Rome, where, at each step we encounter some great man, some conqueror of a powerful nation, or some venerable patriot, who has rejected with disdain a foreign crown, to remain a simple citizen at home. The English have certainly very little desire to propagate their literature beyond the limits of their own country. They resemble those states, by whose fundamental laws the spirit of conquest is proscribed. But at home their power is formidable indeed. An English writer, who should be regarded with veneration by all Europe, but whom his countrymen considered with indifference, would lament the obscurity of his name. What has been said of the Romans, that they were an assemblage of heroes, may, in a literature sense be applied to the English; the whole nation bears the impression of genius.

I SHALL content myself with only mentioning two of their great authors. MILTON composed a poem so energetic, so sublime, that, on its first appearance, it was superior to the conception even of the English themselves. In the present age, which has done justice to almost every instance of neglected merit, the English are delighted to find that their country and their language possesses one of the most sublime productions of the human mind. In MILTON nature had reversed her wonted order of proceeding. In youth he was a politician, in old age he was a poet. MILTON astonishes the judgment of his readers. All the rules of poetic probability disappear before him. As we read, we are wholly immersed in admiration. But, if instead of genius, the reader possesses a geometrical exactness only, and if he has substituted to sensibility a factitious taste, he will pause to criticize MILTON at every line. In fact, it would be highly absurd to expect in works of imagination a mathematical correctness. We are organised to feel rather than to think. Nature therefore has given us but few channels of intelligence; but those of sensation she has multiplied without end. Of regularity she is not ambitious. She has never promised to defend us from deception. On the contrary, her most beautiful phenomena are splendid illusions; and the most enchanting pleasures of life only delightful chimeras.

POPE was actuated by a continual energy of genius. Philosophy and the graces seem to have vied with each other in forming him to deliver through a new channel, truths the most important and energetic to the human race. Poetry which hitherto had flattered the ear, and bloomed  
only



only to the imagination, became in his hands the tutors of man, whom he conducted by charms till then unknown, to a knowledge of his various relations to himself, to the universe, and to his author. So brilliant was the merit of POPE, that even in his life-time he triumphed over an host of literary banditti, who dared to conspire against his fame. But we, nations of the continent, are ignorant of their writings, nor have their odious names ever passed the limits of their isle. POPE exhibited to Europe HOMER, sublime, sonorous, and majestic, as when he charmed the ancient Greeks. If the rage of depressing modern merit were not natural to the human race, the translator of HOMER would have seen a temple erected to his honour.

MILTON and POPE have carried the English language to a state of perfection, which no modern language can equal.

IN every nation there are two paths to glory: literature, and arms. One half of Europe our arms have subjugated, and made the other tremble. To convert Swedes into heroes, is no difficult task. Nature, in that respect, has been bountiful of materials. But because they abound in valour, is it therefore fair to refuse them genius? The same ardour of soul, which, in the field of battle, inspires a contempt of danger, will also, in solitude, inflame the poet, and exalt the genius to those sublime flights, which raise the admiration of the world. A coward is as incapable of genius as of heroism.

BEYOND

BEYOND the imperfect glory of military virtue, the greatest of our Monarchs have never been able to conduct the nation. For GUSTAVUS the III. it was reserved to complete the glory of the Swedish name. By the powerful incitements of example and encouragement he has in a few years effected, that which many generations of worthy sovereigns were not able to accomplish. The literary glory of Sweden he has created; and rescued from oblivion her military honours \*. The trophies of victory vanish and are forgotten, except the voice of genius proclaim the warlike exploits; nor from the silent tomb will the influence of the hero far extend; nor will many be excited to the imitation of his great or patriotic exertions, unless the glowing pencil of Eloquence emblazon them in the Temple of Fame.

IN the present age the human mind appears to be more alert and restless than in any of the preceding. The rage of war, and the frenzy of fanaticism were the only passions that, at different periods, broke in upon the lethargy of our ancestors. When these two powerful springs of human action began to relax, some other aliment was sought for to feed the incessant cravings of the human heart. Long had philosophy, long had polite literature, ethics, and the fine arts, invited us in vain to their charming retreats: at length we pursue them

\* He has not only rescued from oblivion the memory of the ancient military honours of Sweden, but has renovated, and may be said to have created, the martial glory of the nation, which had been eclipsed for upwards of a century. The naval victory of Swenksfund, which terminated the war of 1788, is the most complete conquest that ever graced the arms of any people, and the first which the Swedes have obtained since 1712.

with avidity. Let those who govern the nations learn, as those who are blessed with genius must feel, that the human race will in the end obtain, by means of the arts, that tranquillity after which they have so long and so vainly aspired.

IN you, Gentlemen, I behold the agents of this inestimable advantage : philosophy, politics, oratory, poesy, have no treasures of which some of you are not masters. Moulded by your skilful hands, our language recedes more and more from its ancient rudeness. We have seen it bend to the subtile graces of the most refined raillery, we have examples of its following the tempestuous career of passion, and soaring to the most sublime flights of imagination. As with ornaments, it is with languages ; they are becoming only on beautiful objects.

# **D I S C O U R S E**

**DELIVERED IN THE SWEDISH ACADEMY,**

**BY THE SENATOR**

**COUNT T. G. OXENSTIERNA,**

**PRESIDENT TO THE GRAND COUNCIL OF THE ROYAL CHANCERY, FIRST LORD  
OF THE BEDCHAMBER TO HIS MAJESTY, GRAND MASTER OF HER MAJESTY'S  
HOUSEHOLD, COMMANDER OF THE ORDER OF THE POLAR STAR;**

**On his Admiffion, March 20, 1786.**

19772B



# D I S C O U R S E

B Y

COUNT T. G. OXENSTIERNA,

---

GENTLEMEN,

IF a warm attachment to pursuits, to which this Academy is devoted, were a qualification sufficient for becoming a member of it, no one perhaps would have a stronger claim than myself to a place in this assembly. Wholly engrossed by the happiness of such a situation, I should feel a pleasure, which the comparison of my own defects with your distinguished talents, would be unable to disturb. In the contemplation of my unmerited good fortune, I should be sometimes diverted from reflection upon the distance, which separates your productions from the trifles which, though they have served occasionally to amuse a vacant hour, were little calculated to attract the public attention.

DES-

DESTITUTE as I am of every talent which, by securing your approbation, is certain to secure a seat at your illustrious board; I am nevertheless impressed with the most lively sense of the eminent service which a Monarch, dear to our hearts, has done to the cause of polite literature, by fixing upon you, Gentlemen, as the proper instruments for raising it to perfection. Incapable of affording any example in myself, I have the singular felicity, of being numbered in the society of such, as are most amply endowed with every requisite, to make them models of excellence. Charmed with the prospect, my fancy anticipates the height, to which those soaring geniuses will attain, who, following the light of your instructions, will hereafter exalt the reputation of our literature by a purity of diction, added to elevation, and energy of thought. Already, invigorated by your precepts, poetry prepares to transmit to posterity, in the most brilliant and glowing colours, a picture of the opinions and polished manners of an enlightened age. Already solicitous to immortalize in the language of our country the memory of its great men, eloquence discovers in the persons of those, who have enriched her with the choicest ornaments of speech, the most deserving objects of her praise. With admiration I contemplate the protector of the belles lettres condescending to enrol his illustrious name with the names of those whom he has directed to promulgate and maintain the rules which genius avows, and of which his own is an eminent example.

THIS

THIS code, seconded and supported by his example, will finally settle and decide the opinions of a reflecting age, which no longer regards the study of polite literature as tending to cast a damp upon the martial spirit of a manly people. The country which has given birth to heroes, now delights to deck with literary laurels the warrior brow; and in the fine arts, so often accused of enervating the mind, sees only that mild influence which, by smoothing the ruggedness of virtue, gives her charms which the Graces alone can bestow. Cloathed in the resplendent robes of genius, and invested with the magnificent grandeur of history, Virtue will henceforward present herself to a people, whose veneration shall amply compensate her past oppression. Her future triumph is secured; and by poetry and eloquence transmitted to after ages, the memory of her immortal actions shall brighten to the admiring view of far remote posterity.

AWAKENED by the dawn of the age of GUSTAVUS from a long night of torpidity, the Swedish Muses find here a peaceful asylum. Charmed with inhabiting a temple, which he has dedicated to their service, happy in assembling at the cheerful call of a genius, who animates them by his example no less than his munificence, they repair towards the North in a garb far more becoming, than when, following the footsteps of our ancient warriors, they engraved on the rude tombs of pirates the Runic praise. Now their only difficulty is to select an object from the multitude of heroes who press forward to immortality; while at the foot of that throne, where formerly, in rude  
and



and dissonant notes, they sang savage scenes of slaughter and devastation, they now celebrate the serenity of concord, the blessings of liberty, and the love of the human race.

WITH ungrateful silence the Muses have never been reproached. Never have they abandoned to oblivion the memory of their benefactors. It is not now for the first time, that the heir to the sceptre of the VASA's, receives the homage of their adoration. The glory of his ancestors adorns their annals, a glory, which they are ever ready to vindicate as their own. To their now protector they now approach with the same tribute of love and veneration, which to the name of GUSTAVUS they have ever willingly offered up. With alacrity they discharge the duty, which Fame commits to their care; and eager to paint the sublimest virtues, they quit the fictions of antiquity, to present to the world in colours, tempered by Genius and the Graces, a picture drawn by the hand of truth.

T H E E N D.



















[



